



## ORIGINAL RESEARCH

## EVALUATION OF TMJ ARTHROSCOPY WITH HYALURONIC ACID INJECTION VERSUS STANDARD TMJ ARTHROSCOPY FOR PATIENTS WITH INTERNAL DERANGEMENTS: A RANDOMIZED CLINICAL TRIAL

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### Abstract

**Background:** Initial Temporomandibular joint (TMJ) arthroscopy aims to reduce inflammation and mechanical obstruction in TMJ internal derangement. Supplemental hyaluronic acid (HA) deposition is frequently employed to improve joint lubrication and protect articular surfaces, yet its long-term therapeutic impact as an adjunct is not well-defined.

**Objective:** While TMJ arthroscopy is a standard treatment for TMJ internal derangements (ID), the added therapeutic value of HA as an adjunct remains unclear.

**Study Design:** Randomized controlled trial with 1:1 allocation. Setting: Patients with TMJ ID was selected from those attending the Outpatient Clinic of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery Department at Sayed Galal University Hospital, Al Azhar University and Faculty of Dental Medicine, Boys, Cairo Al Azhar University

**Participants:** twelve patients over 18 years of both sexes, suffer from TMJ ID which not respond to conservative treatments, were randomized into two groups, study group (n= 6) patients and control group (n=6) patients. **Interventions:** Participants receive either standard TMJ arthroscopic lysis and lavage (ALL) alone (Control Group) or the same ALL supplemented with an intra-articular injection of HA (study Group). Both protocols were performed under general anesthesia for patients diagnosed with TMJID.

**Main Outcome Measures:**, including pain levels according visual analog scale (VAS) and maximal interincisal opening (MIO), laterality excursion, protrusion, chewing efficacy and disc position change in MRI, were assessed between groups at standard follow-up intervals

**Results:** Both groups showed significant pain reduction, but HA group reported significantly lower pain at 3 months (2.00 vs. 4.33,  $p = 0.016$ ) and 6 months (1.33 vs. 4.33,  $p = 0.005$ ), No statistically significant differences were observed between the groups for any additional parameters throughout the follow-up period ( $p > 0.05$ ), with both cohorts demonstrating comparable improvements in maximal incisal opening (MIO).

**Conclusions:** TMJ arthroscopy effectively treats ID, with adjunctive HA providing superior early pain relief and functional recovery. However, long-term functional outcomes are comparable to standard arthroscopy alone. While HA accelerates initial healing, standard arthroscopy remains a highly reliable definitive treatment.

**Keywords:** Temporomandibular joint, internal derangement, Arthroscopy, hyaluronic acid, pain.

## INTRODUCTION

The temporomandibular joint (TMJ) is a ginglymodiarthroidal joint; having both rotational and translational movements. This joint is formed of the mandibular condyle fitting into the mandibular fossa of the temporal bone. Where the articular disk separates these two bones<sup>1</sup>.

Moreover, the temporomandibular disorders (TMDs) are considered as the most common causes of non odontogenic pain in the maxillofacial region, affecting the TMJ itself as well as the associated anatomical structures<sup>2</sup>. About 10 millions of populations suffering from TMDs in the USA as well as treated in studies<sup>3</sup>. Although Seventy-five percent of adults show at least one sign of joint dysfunction during examination and one third have at least single clinical symptom<sup>4</sup>.

Diagnosis of the TMDs is reached through anamnesis however the clinical examination concomitantly with using of imaging techniques which increase the accuracy of the diagnosis. Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) is accepted as the gold standard diagnostic aids of non calcified structures of the TMJ<sup>5</sup>. There was a variety of classifications, 1989, Wilkes<sup>6</sup> first established a classification which consists of 5 stages depending on the clinical, radiologic, and intraoperative findings. Besides, most internationally used diagnostic tools during the last two decades have been the Research Diagnostic Criteria for TMD (RDC/TMD) and the TMD classification according to the American Academy of Orofacial Pain<sup>7,8</sup>.

In concern management of TMDs consists of non invasive treatment which includes patient education, prescription of medications, physical therapy and occlusal appliances. Many patients recover with only jaw rest and soft diet, while others may require a combination of these non invasive treatments<sup>9</sup>.

Arthrocentesis is a minimally invasive treatment often used in patients who do not respond to conservative treatment to relieve symptoms that impair the quality of life has inspired many studies.<sup>10</sup> Arthrocentesis is minimally invasive, inexpensive and highly effective procedure, apart from having a low morbidity rate<sup>11</sup>. It is valued because arthrocentesis does not involve visualization of the joint structures or the use of additional surgical manipulations, it raises the question of whether arthroscopy should be the preferred initial treatment TMDs.<sup>12</sup> TMJ arthroscopy was first performed by Wanatabe M.<sup>13</sup>, a Japanese orthopedic surgeon. After that, Holmlund et al.<sup>14</sup> popularized TMJ arthroscopy. Since then TMJ arthroscopy became a

widely popular, leading to open surgical treatment for TMD is now uncommon, and is reserved for specific indications as well as end-stage diseases, ankylosis and removal of tumour among others<sup>15</sup>.

Arthroscopy may be finished with intra articular injections, many different substances that can be injected following TMJ arthroscopy to enhance the best possible clinical results.<sup>16</sup> Among these substances hyaluronic acid (HA) and platelets rich plasma (PRP). The HA is a glycosaminoglycan, naturally present in synovial fluid and participating in joint lubrication, that is produced by chondrocytes and synoviocytes within any joint<sup>17,18</sup>.

Therefore, the main objective of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of HA injection following operative arthroscopy, compared with the conventional TMJ arthroscopy, in patients with (TMJID).

## PATIENTS AND METHODS

**Study Design:** This study was designed as a randomized, parallel-arm clinical trial with a 1:1 allocation ratio. The primary objective was to test the null hypothesis that no statistically significant difference exists in HA deposition between TMJ ALL supplemented with HA versus standard TMJ ALL alone. Ethical clearance was obtained (Approval Code: [Code]) before the study commenced, and the trial was retrospectively registered at ClinicalTrials.gov (Identifier: 884/1960). This report adheres to the updated CONSORT guidelines for randomized clinical trials

### Participants

**Inclusion criteria:** Patients over 18 years of both sexes. Patients with a diagnosis of TMJID according to Wilkes classification of TMDs. Patients who did not respond to conservative treatment as a first line of treatment.

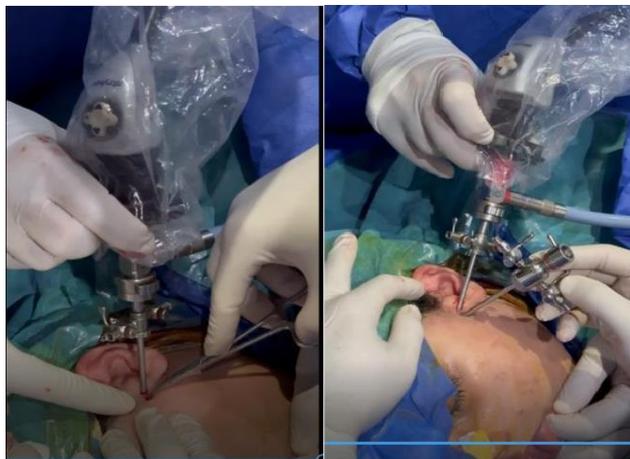
**Exclusion criteria** comprised Patients with polyarthritis or degenerative joint disease. Patients with myofascial pain, Previous TMJ surgery, Uncontrolled systemic diseases contraindicating general anesthesia or surgery. Ankylosis, intra-articular tumor spread, overlying skin infections. Lactating, pregnant or planning pregnancy women. Known hypersensitivity to HA. Inability to attend follow-up appointments. Prior to enrollment, written informed consent was secured from all participants. a sample of n=5 per group was required to detect an effect size of d=2.18 alpha=0.05, power=0.80. Adjusting for a 20% dropout rate, the total sample size was set at n=12 (6 per group).

**Randomization and blinding**

An independent assistant, uninvolved in recruitment or study procedures, generated the random allocation sequence (1-12). Each number was sealed in an opaque envelope, which were then shuffled. Immediately prior to surgery, the envelope was opened to reveal the assigned surgical technique.

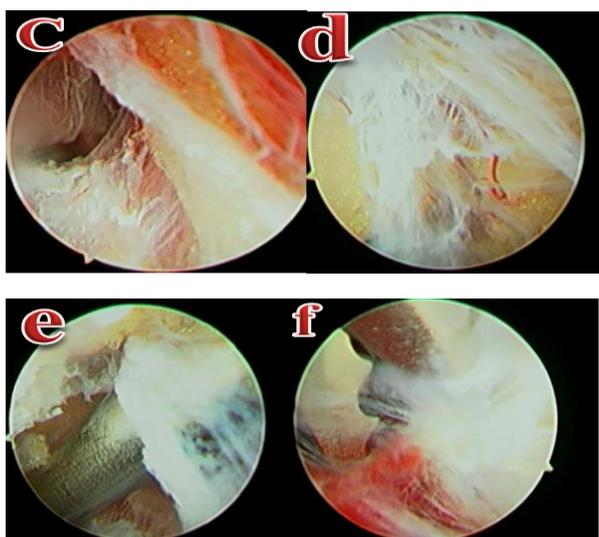
**Interventions**

**Preoperative phase:** Clinical parameters, including pain, and functional range of motion—specifically maximal interincisal opening (MIO), contralateral lateral excursion (LE), and protrusive movements, chewing efficacy were recorded for all patients. Additionally, Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) was performed to evaluate disc position and joint morphology. Figures 1(a,b)



**Figure 1 a.** posterior portal for inflow, arthroscope camera.

**Figure 1 b.** two portals were established inflow and outflow.



**Figure 2 c,d,e,f** intra articular image showing posterior recess, adhesion and synovitis, outflow sheath and grasper head.

A rigid endoscope with an outer diameter of 2.4mm and a 30° viewing angle (Karl Storz SE & Co. KG, Tuttlingen, Germany) was used for the procedure. All patients underwent arthroscopy under general anesthesia. the portals for inflow and outflow are established along the Holmlund-Helsing line.(14) (cantho-tragal ligne). After occluding the external auditory canal with sterile cotton, the surgical field was scrubbed and draped using standard sterile techniques. Entrance points was located along the canthotragal line, The primary inflow/fossa puncture was marked 10 mm anterior to the tragus and 2 mm inferior to the line. The secondary outflow portal was marked 20 mm anterior to the tragus and 10 mm inferior to the line.(21)

In a supine position with the head rotated, the superior joint space was distended (3 mL saline/2% lidocaine) and backwashed. each patient received a double portal puncture (level II arthroscopy), Using a 2.4 mm trocar-cannula sheath, a primary portal was established; placement was confirmed by saline fluctuation during jaw movement before inserting a 2.3 mm arthroscopy. Figure (a) An anterolateral second portal was created for outflow and instrumentation. Figure 2(b) Lysis and lavage were performed using 500 ml Ringer's lactate, delivered via an infusion pump through the primary cannula. This maintained continuous pressure to facilitate adhesiolysis and the drainage of inflammatory mediators through the outflow portal.

**Control group:** Lysis and lavage Ringer's lactate alone.

**Study group:** Lysis and lavage with Ringer's lactate. Deposition of 20 ml of HA post ALL. Stab incision were closed with 5-0 sutures and dressed. Following 5–10 assisted maximal mouth opening repetitions, patients were extubated.

**Postoperative management**

a preauricular pressure dressing was applied for 48 hours. Patients received amoxicillin/clavulanic acid (625 mg) and an analgesic complex (ibuprofen 400mg/paracetamol500mg ). Cryotherapy was used for 24 hours (20-minute intervals), followed by moist heat. The diet progressed from liquid to soft over three months. Occlusal splint therapy and physiotherapy (vertical/lateral exercises) commenced at 24 hours. Sutures were removed after one week

**Observation and follow-up**

Clinical assessments were conducted at baseline and postoperatively at 1 and 2 weeks, and 1, 3, and 6 months.

**Parameters included**

- Pain: Evaluated via Visual Analogue Scale (VAS) daily for the first week, then at each follow-up interval.
- Mandibular Kinematics: MIO, lateral excursion, and protrusion were measured using Vernier electronic calipers.
- Functional Outcomes: Chewing efficacy was evaluated using a 3-item food questionnaire (liquid, soft, and hard foods).
- Radiological Evaluation: Preoperative MRI findings were compared with follow-up scans obtained at 6 months. Figures (i,g).

**Statistical Analysis**

Descriptive statistics are reported as mean ± SD, median (IQR), or counts (%). Data normality was confirmed via Kolmogorov-Smirnov test (D=0.13532, p=0.894). Continuous variables were analyzed using independent t-tests for inter-group comparisons. Analysis was performed via IBM SPSS v.21, with significance set at p < 0.05.

**RESULT**

**Demographic Data**

The mean age for Group I was 28.67 years (SD = 10.03), while for Group II, it was 30.17 years (SD = 7.08). The ages range from 21 to 48 and 23 to 41 for both groups respectively. Regarding gender distribution, in Group I, 5 out of 6 participants (83.3%) were female, and 1 (16.7%) was male. In Group II, all 6 participants (100%) were female. There were nonstatistically significant between both groups as regard age and gender (table 1). With a P value of 0.771 for age and 0.296 for gender.

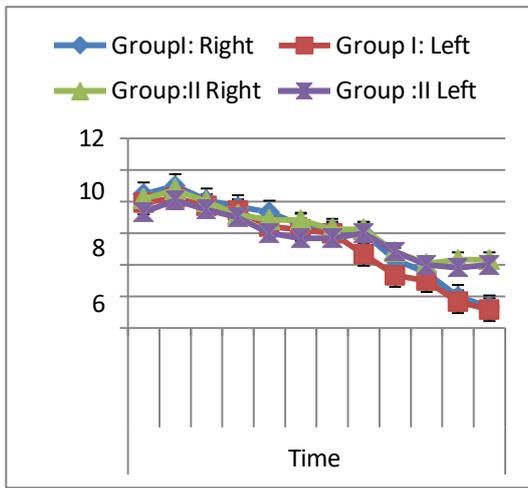
Preoperative VAS scores were comparable between groups for both right (p = 0.271) and left (p = 0.210) TMJs. While no significant differences occurred in early follow-ups, Group I (HA) demonstrated

Group I at 3 and 6 months. significantly lower pain at 3 and 6 months bilaterally (all p < 0.05) Table(1). Specifically, at 6 months, HA scores were markedly lower for both right (1.33 vs. 4.33, p = 0.005) and left TMJs (1.17 vs. 4.00, p < 0.001), indicating superior long-term pain reduction with HA injection table 1. Preoperative MIO, lateral excursion, and protrusion were comparable between groups (p > 0.05). For MIO and lateral excursion, no statistically significant differences were observed at any postoperative interval up to 6 months (p = 0.078–0.975), despite slight trends favoring Group I at 3 and 6 months.

In contrast, Group I (HA) demonstrated significantly greater protrusion during the early postoperative phase: Day 1 (p=0.030), Day 2 (p=0.001), and Day 3 (p=0.045). However, this advantage diminished over time, with protrusion scores remaining statistically similar from 1 week through 6 months (p = 0.205–0.783).

**Table 1. Pain comparison between two Groups, VAS)**

VAS score for Pain	Group I (n=6)	Group II (n=6)	Test value	P-value
<b>Right</b>				
Pre Op.	8.47±0.59	8.17±0.23	1.166	0.271
1st	9.00±0.89	8.75±0.76	0.522	0.613
2nd	8.10±0.79	8.00±0.63	0.243	0.813
3rd	7.67±0.82	7.17±0.41	1.342	0.209
4th	7.33±1.03	6.85±0.97	0.837	0.422
5th	6.50±1.22	6.83±1.33	- 0.452	0.661
6th	6.17±1.17	6.25±0.61	- 0.155	0.880
7th	6.00±1.67	6.25±1.08	- 0.307	0.765
2w	4.33±1.21	4.83±1.72	- 0.483	0.640
1M	3.50±0.98	4.08±1.43	- 0.656	0.527
3M	2.00±0.56	4.33±1.03	- 2.907	0.016*
6M	1.33±0.37	4.33±1.21	- 3.614	0.005*
<b>Left</b>				
Pre Op.	7.92±0.68	7.33±0.82	1.34	0.210
1st	8.25±0.76	8.08±0.66	0.405	0.694
2nd	7.72±0.47	7.50±0.45	0.817	0.433
3rd	7.42±1.02	7.00±0.63	0.85	0.415
4th	6.42±0.49	6.00±1.10	0.85	0.415
5th	6.23±0.43	5.67±1.03	1.24	0.243
6th	6.00±0.00	5.67±1.37	0.598	0.563
7th	4.67±0.74	6.00±1.41	- 1.195	0.260
2w	3.33±0.93	4.83±1.33	- 1.671	0.126
1M	3.00±0.84	4.00±1.10	- 1.225	0.249
3M	1.67±0.47	3.83±1.17	- 2.951	0.014*
6M	1.17±0.33	4.00±0.89	- 4.715	<0.001**



**Figure. 3** Comparison between two groups according to VAS score for pain.

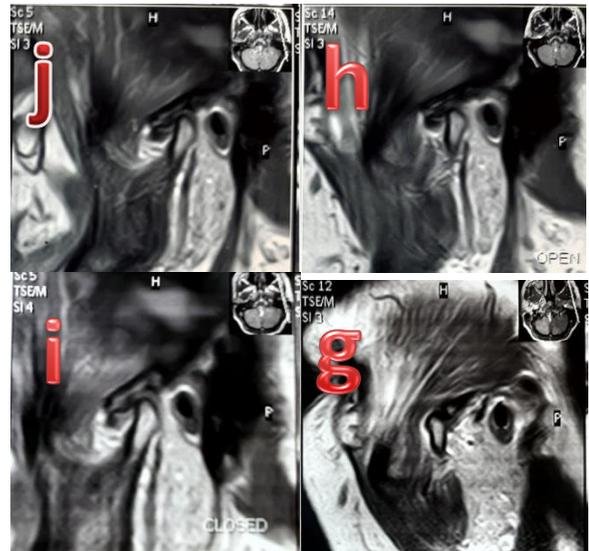
Preoperative and early postoperative chewing efficacy were identical, with both groups restricted to soft foods at baseline and liquid diets through Day 6 ( $p = 1.000$ ). By months 2 and 3, Group I (HA) showed a trend toward faster return to hard foods (83.3% and 100%, respectively) compared to Group II (50% and 66.7%), though these differences were not statistically significant ( $p \geq 0.121$ ).

Baseline and postoperative MRI findings showed no significant differences between groups bilaterally ( $p > 0.05$ ) table2.

**Table 2. Comparison between Group I and Group II according to MRI.**

MRI finding	Group I (n=6)		Group II (n=6)		Test value	P-value
	No.	%	No.	%		
<b>Right</b>						
<b>Pre</b>						
DDWOR	4	66.7%	6	100.0%	2.400	0.121
DDWR	2	33.3%	0	0.0%		
<b>Post</b>						
DDWOR	3	50.0%	4	66.7%	0.343	0.558
DDWR	3	50.0%	2	33.3%		
<b>Left</b>						
<b>Pre</b>						
DDWOR	4	66.7%	2	33.3%	1.333	0.248
DDWR	2	33.3%	4	66.7%		
<b>Post</b>						
DDWOR	1	16.7%	1	16.7%	0.000	1.000
DDWR	5	83.3%	5	83.3%		

Preoperatively, disc displacement without reduction (DDWOR) was the predominant finding. Postoperatively, both groups demonstrated similar transitions to disc displacement with reduction (DDWR); on the right side, Group I improved to a 50% DDWR rate compared to 33.3% in Group II ( $p = 0.558$ ), while on the left side, both groups achieved identical outcomes with 83.3% reaching DDWR ( $p = 1.000$ ). These results indicate that both treatment modalities were equally effective in improving disc position



**Figure4** j,h MRI closed and open preoperative  
**Figure 4** i,g MRI closed and open postoperative

## DISCUSSION

The primary objective of this research was to assess the efficacy of HA deposition post TMJ ALL versus TMJ ALL alone in achieving superior pain relief, MIO, laterality excursion, protrusion, chewing efficacy and MRI improvement changes six months post-arthroscopic procedure.

Both groups were demographically comparable, with no significant differences in age, both showed a strong female predilection. This baseline homogeneity ensures that subsequent outcomes are attributable to the intervention rather than demographic variables.

Epidemiological research indicates a significant female predilection in TMJ disorders. Despite extensive investigation into hormonal influences, psychosocial stressors, and genetic predispositions, the exact mechanisms driving this demographic trend remain not fully understood this result was in accordance of study performed by Bagis B.<sup>18</sup> While literature suggests that TMJ disorders peak between the ages of 20 and 40 Manfredini et al.<sup>19</sup>.The

results of this study mirrored this distribution, with 83% of participants in their second through fourth decades and an average age of 33.9 years.

In this study using HMW of HA, The HA binds to cell receptors to modulate immune responses and suppress inflammatory cascades, effectively reducing joint pain. Additionally, it acts as a biological shock absorber, cushioning joint structures by distributing mechanical loads<sup>20</sup>.

Preoperative pain was comparable across all joints. While most follow-up intervals showed no significant differences, the HA group demonstrated superior long-term pain relief at 3 and 6 months. In both sides, pain scores were significantly decreased. These findings suggest that while arthroscopy provides initial relief for both groups, the addition of HA significantly enhances and sustains pain reduction over time. The HA exerts an analgesic effect by desensitizing intra-articular nerve endings. This finding aligns with previous controlled studies, which similarly reported significant improvements in pain<sup>21</sup>.

This was in accordance with Morey-Mas MA<sup>22</sup>. The HA injections following ALL observed a significant enhancement of pain reduction and TMJ function compared to Ringer's lactate. This finding was not supported across a systematic review performed by Xie et al.<sup>23</sup> In terms of pain reduction, there is no significant difference between HA and placebo, regardless of the follow-up duration.

While both study cohorts experienced a reduction in TMJ pain, the HA group demonstrated significant pain reduction across 3 and 6 months of follow-up. These findings reinforce the hypothesis that HA exerts independent analgesic and anti-inflammatory effects that complement the mechanical benefits of arthroscopic lavage and debridement.

As regards the MIO, and lateral excursions improved significantly in both groups with no statistical difference between them. While Group I (HA) experienced a significant boost in protrusive movement during the first three days post-op, this benefit subsided by one week, resulting in similar long-term outcomes for both techniques. This was in agreement with Castaño Joaquín et al.<sup>18</sup> and Morey-Mas et al.<sup>22</sup> who demonstrated that it does not establish the clinical superiority of HA injection post ALL compared with ALL alone. The observed improvements may stem from a multimodal approach involving arthroscopy, adjunctive medications, and physiotherapy.

In contrast, Stasko et al.<sup>24</sup> demonstrated that combining arthroscopy with HA injection significantly reduces pain and restores oral opening. This dual approach effectively debrides adhesions

while flushing inflammatory mediators to enhance joint mobility.

HA reduces inflammation and prevents adhesion recurrence. By restoring joint lubrication and protecting cartilage, HA effectively modulates granulation tissue to improve long-term surgical outcomes<sup>25</sup>.

Regarding chewing efficiency, findings indicate that Preoperative and early postoperative chewing efficiency was identical across groups, with all patients restricted to soft foods at baseline and liquid diets through Day 6. By one month, both groups successfully returned to soft foods. By months 2–3, Group I (HA) showed a clinical trend toward faster recovery, reaching 100% hard food consumption compared to 66.7% in Group II. Although HA may accelerate chewing efficacy, the lack of statistical significance ( $p = 0.221$ ) necessitates larger confirmatory studies.

Chewing efficacy is a key metric for assessing TMJ ID and recovery from TMJ arthroscopy. While TMJ ID patients typically suffer from impaired muscle activity and reduced chewing efficacy, following TMJ arthroscopy, significant improvement typically occurs rapidly within the first 4 to 6 weeks. Most patients can tolerate soft and medium food textures with minimal pain or discomfort during chewing<sup>26</sup>.

MRI evaluation demonstrated that both groups had similar types of disc displacement preoperatively. Postoperative imaging showed improved disc positioning (from DDWOR to DDWR) in both groups, with no significant inter-group differences, with no statistically significant differences between the groups. This indicates that HA injection did not significantly alter the disc position outcomes achieved through TMJ ALL alone. This finding was aligned with that reported by Silva et al.<sup>27</sup> He demonstrated that 63% of patients achieved an improved disc position following ALL. Despite the MRI findings in this study conflicting with those by Gabler, M.J., et al.<sup>28</sup> This suggests that restoring disc mobility and functional dynamics is clinically more significant than achieving anatomical repositioning of the disc<sup>29</sup>.

Regarding intraoperative complications, fluid extravasation represents the most common intraoperative finding, minor bleeding is also routine and generally controlled via pressure and irrigation. This outcome corroborates the findings of González-García R et al.<sup>51</sup>. Within the study group, neurological complications were documented in two cases, involving numbness in the left temporal region and motor weakness in the right eyebrow respectively. Within the control group, one subject of left temporal

paresthesia was documented. Both the sensory deficit and motor weakness achieved complete resolution within 4 to 8 weeks, the management was following a regimen of Vitamin B12, corticosteroids, and physical therapy during the follow-up periods<sup>52</sup>. The close anatomical proximity of the auriculotemporal nerve and the temporal and zygomatic branches of the facial nerve to the arthroscopic portals renders them susceptible to injury. Mechanical compression or direct trauma from the cannula may result in transient neurological deficits, manifesting as paresthesia or paresis<sup>53</sup>.

Limitations of this study include a small sample size, which restricts generalizability, and a six-month follow-up, which precludes assessment of long-term joint stability or late-onset degeneration. Furthermore, Wilkes stage heterogeneity may have confounded results, necessitating stage-specific stratification in future research.

### CONCLUSION

While TMJ arthroscopy with HA offers superior early-term analgesia and accelerated protrusive recovery, long-term functional and structural outcomes—including disc position and chewing efficacy are comparable to standard arthroscopy. Both modalities significantly improve mandibular mobility and edema over six months. Thus, HA serves as a beneficial adjunct for immediate postoperative recovery, but standard arthroscopy remains an equally effective definitive treatment for TMJID.

### DECLARATION

#### Conflict of interest

Authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

#### Source of funding

There are no funds procured

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